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LAGGING INTEREST.

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EXISTING FLES TEACHING MATERIALS ARE REVIEWED GENERALLY AND CRITICIZED, AND SUGGESTIONS ARE MADE FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENT. EMPHASIS SHOULD BE GIVEN TO KEEPING UP THE CLASS'S INTEREST AND PROVIDING TEACHING AIDS THAT ARE REALLY PORTABLE. A WELL-ARTICULATED, SEQUENTIAL TEXT SERIES FROM FLES THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL IS ADVISED. THEIR THEMES SHOULD REFLECT INTERESTS DETERMINED BY THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES, CHAPTERS SHOULD CONSIST OF A NUMBER OF SHORT PRESENTATIONS THAT MAY BE CONNECTED OR LEARNED AND USED SEPARATELY, AND DRILLS AND READING SHOULD BE ON VARIOUS LEVELS SO THAT MORE CAPABLE CHILDREN WOULD PROCEED MORE RAPIDLY WHILE LESS CAPABLE ONES COULD HAVE MORE WORK. CHILDREN SHOULD BE GUIDED TOWARD DEVELOPING THEIR OWN SCRIPTS FROM A GIVEN OUTLINE. CARTOONS MIGHT COME BEFORE READING IS FORMALLY PRESENTED, BUT READING SKILLS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED EARLIER THAN THEY ARE NOW. SUGGESTIONS ARE MADE ON APPROPRIATE ILLUSTRATIONS, AND ON CONSTRUCTION OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING MANUAL. FOR MATERIAL, PUBLISHERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSULT FLES TEACHERS RATHER THAN LINGUISTS OR COLLEGE PROFESSORS. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE, CHICAGO, DECEMBER 27, 1967. (AF)

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LAGGING INTEREST

The success of the total FLES undertaking rests almost completely with the teacher. It is he who directs the activities, who changes the pace when the class becomes restless, who involves the group and its individuals in the whole process and motivates each pupil to attain the degree of mastery of which he is capable. Nevertheless, complementary materials are integral parts of the FLES program.

The classical ideal of a perfect education was Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and the student on the other. The concept would still be valid if only the eminent Mr. Hopkins were licensed in Spanish, for the essential is to involve each student intimately and wholly in the area he is trying to master. In the absence of the unrealizable one-to-one relationship, we must resort to other devices to entice our charges to continue paying close attention.

Boredom is the ever-present ogre assailing the language class. FLES classes are perhaps especially vulnerable because they are limited by the scope of their immediate goals and by the nature of the younger child. Let boredom set in once and the teacher will find himself hard put to regain full control of the teaching situation.

And because boredom is so great an enemy of our program, we must constantly be on our guard against it. In a single period

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the FLES teacher must avail himself of a variety of approaches: there may be a question and answer session, a new dialog presented, an old one dramatized, a short quiz, a song or game, a paragraph read and a pattern isolated and drilled. He may have resorted to mechanical devices: the overhead or filmstrip projector, a flannelboard or a tape recorder. In our schools we picture the FLES teacher as we usually see him: a harassed individual rushing down the halls pushing a supermarket carriage loaded with paraphernalia to motivate, titillate and inculcate.

Despite all the efforts of the FLES teachers to maintain student interest - and they are mighty ones - this very fundamental determinant of <u>our</u> ultimate success must be the concern of <u>publishers as well</u>. School mailboxes are crammed with publishers' advertisements for new texts or workbooks. Each professes itself the panacea for all our ills; their dialogs will intrigue the children, the exercises will excite their eager participation, the songs and games will hold them entranced and the tapes will permit the teacher the luxury of a momentary relaxation of the vocal cords. But order the materials for examination before purchase; study them carefully. What do you find? - The same tired approaches dressed up in new and shiny trappings.

This spring, preparatory to selecting a new series, I had the occasion to review many of the FLES materials currently available. I actually sat down and worked out the texts to see how

the pupils might use them as well as to try to determine how much supplementary work would be demanded of the teacher. What I did discover was incidental: the predominant topics of dialogs and readings were of slight interest to the teacher and of far less interest to the pupils. Units were devoted in <u>their</u> entirety to greetings and farewells, or to formulas of children and adults introducing each other rather than incorporating such items into other productive units. Others were deeply concerned with setting the table, cutting flowers in the garden, painting the house, catching fish, sewing, or twenty lines given to telephone and address numbers. Few made any attempt at offering alternatives meant specifically for boys or girls. As a matter of curiosity and to double check interest areas, I asked my classes what they especially like to talk about. The majority of boys liked war stories, nature, animals - both familiar and pre-historic, mechanical operations, sports and sportsmen stories. The girls wanted stories about clothes, other girls, teenage problems (although the children were fourth graders). Both sexes listed riddles, puzzles, mischief-type fun and general identification with the situations. Except for a description of clothing, food and some animals, occasional interfamilial warfare, i.e. come to the table! sit closer! eat your food or else! and mention of jai-alai and corridas, I found little evidence of those themes either in the dialogs or supplementary readings.

But far more damaging was the fact that almost every chapter began and progressed in the same fashion: dialog, supplement,

drills, game. Seldom did the narrative replace the dialog or the basic sentences. Furthermore, the class almost always had to learn the whole dialog to be able to use whatever exercises were provided. Vocabulary depended largely on nouns and interjections. Adjectives that would permit children to describe themselves and their own background were scarce. The illustrations were often brightly colored but similar to those that accompany the Dick and Jane type of texts - or too complicated; they seldom challenged and encouraged the child to develop original conversation specifically in the early books of the extended series. No real sense of progress seemed evident; chapter fifteen gives one the impression that he is undertaking a talkier chapter three. In one series, after four years, the child is still taught how to greet a newcomer.

From the teacher's point of view, I discovered few honest aids to variety or lesson development. The lessons present a fatiguing sameness of approach and theme, enlivened only by an occasional bright line which invites development and discussion. The exercises usually are too few and are seldom repeated in later units for reenter and review. The pattern drills and dialog adaptations require little thought and leave a little mental residue. Few, if any, tests or evaluative devices are incorporated in the body of the texts -- although it must be admitted that some books that I have recently examined have added evaluative exercises in the chapters at the upper ends of the sequence.

One would hope that the teacher's manual accompanying the text might complement the texts by suggesting creative lesson plans, integrated supplementary activities and utilization of inexpensive and readily available supplies as well as effective drills and quizzes. Unhappily, here, too, I was disillusioned. Some materials had no manuals; a few rapidly sketched ideas on the teacher's edition had to suffice. Others were attractive and thick. But they offered stale lesson plans which repeated an identical format day after day indicating only: review part I, chapter 2, introduce two lines using charts 7, 9 and 11. Some few had excellent introductions on the theory underlying FLES, ideas on how to teach dialogs and drills, excellent bibliographies but they rarely came to grips with what one does from moment to moment and from day to day. By and large they reminded me of a response that I received one day from a prospective candidate for a FLES position. I was asking her just what she would do were she to have a class of thirty fourth graders in front of her. She thought a moment and replied: "I would say 'Buenos dias'"; I waited and she added, "then we would work on the dialog." Punto final.

None of the manuals specifically provided for individual class differences. Every child had to complete the same exercises before advancing. The slower student had no extra drills; the more able no enrichment other than an occasional poem, proverb or fact.

Supplementary materials to accompany the series were very much in evidence and many were excellent. The children were able to manipulate plastic cut-out shapes by means of magnets, move felt cut-outs, respond to posters or stick figures. Tapes and records enabled them to experience new voices and learn songs or hear stories. Again I must qualify my praise. The magnetic pieces and board were extremely expensive and far too heavy for the ordinarily transient FLES teacher to carry; the tapes were recorded at fast normal speed with the spaces too brief to permit the FLESer adequate time to accommodate himself to the pace of the drill. Stories were narrated in that condescending voice that children loathe. Songs were frequently sung by a woman whose high-pitched tones were either laughable or attainable only by a bat.

Articulation, too, presented a problem. Not all the series dovetailed with the work being done at the junior high level. Some repeated well-mastered concepts, others neglected areas and left gaps in the sequential development of the fundamental skills, a lack which too readily caused our impatient secondary foreign language colleagues to throw up their hands in despair and decide too quickly that they must start all over again.

Little wonder, then, that our FLES children after two or three years have had enough. They not only want "no more Spanish" in the elementary school but, even if they decide to continue their language study in secondary school, they are too often tempted to

try a new language until they learn that the same interminable series of dull dialogs and drills await them. In a recent survey taken to poll FLES students for their interests and reactions, a fifth grade girl summed up her feelings in the following words:

> It's very hard to keep two languages up in your head. You never learn anything new, only the same old thing all the time. There's nothing interesting about it if you go over the same thing all the time. I know it's the only way to learn but if you go over it too many times it gets boring and you get tired of the language.

Other than wring our hands and bemoan our fate -- or try the terrible task of writing our own materials -- what can we do? A great deal!

Creative class control can greatly stimulate our program offering, no matter what our textual materials. The FLES teacher who is sensitive to the mood of his classes can smoothly glide from one activity to another in response to the immediate attitude of the group. His general approach should take advantage of the ever-increasing range of media at his disposition. For example, he may present the basic sentences the first day orally, reinforce with posters the second, review with puppet dramatizations, overlays, colored chalks, create a game or sing a song that highlights some phase of the theme, add a tape to ask and answer questions and a flannelboard for manipulation of structures.

But it is not the function of this speech to review the well familiar techniques of pacing, bulletin boards, pen or tape pals, involvement of the children but rather, to indicate how an effective

text series can assist the busy teacher with thoughtfully created lessons.

If I were advising the publishing field, I would suggest the following: a series that flows smoothly and sequentially from FLES through high school. The themes would reflect interests as determined by the children themselves. There would be a clear and readily perceivable growth of ability in all the fundamental skills as the classes progress. A child entering the school when his classmates have mastered a year or two of work should not be able to fit right in with only momentary unease.

Each chapter would consist of a number of short presentations that may be connected or learned and used separately. Some units would have a dialog format, others would use the narrative, or start with review drills that lead to a new dialog; some would be based on extensive questions and answers. Drills and reading would be supplied on various plateau levels so that more capable children would proceed at a more rapid rate while those needing more work would have it readily available.

Occasionally the children would be guided toward developing their own scripts. A bare outline would be provided for guidance, e.g. Me gustan _____(los deportes, las comidas, las vacaciones); sobre todo _____ (la Navidad, el beisbol). Este _____ (ano, mes) quiero (_____ (ir, jugar) a ____(California, el futbel). A more sophisticated boy could create an adventure story: Me gustan las

rubias sobre todo Maria y Luisa. Este verano quiero ir a Mexico con ellas, etc. Furthermore, the drills should require thought on the part of the respondent. He must be consciously forced to formulate a correct answer.

Before reading is formally presented, simple cartoons with a touch of humor might cue the lines. But as reading skills develop, and I believe that this should be done earlier than formerly planned (unless the class consists of poor readers in English), the stories may precede the dialog, the drills may variously be interspersed and incorporate pictures in small but attractive texts. Problems, riddles, proverbs, games which review the work - and I do not consider a chain drill a game - should be an integral part of the units.

The illustrations that accompany each unit ought to reflect a scene treated in the text, yet be simple and authentic. To maintain an American background and at the same time utilize the culturally accurate concepts, a "nosotros-ellos" sections in each unit could highlight similarities and differences. In the chapters on food, pictures can simply depict the contrasts in mealtimes, foods, gestures for hungry and thirsty, I'm full, etc.

The FLES teacher needs help, too. A manual which suggests creative lesson plans, pacing ideas, lists of specific realia, games and songs, and their sources is essential. It should include constant evaluative drills which test the development and understanding

not the parroting of the chapters which make use of pictures, questions and answers, rejoinders, English comprehensions e.g. "When I come in, I say: a. buenos dias, b. adios, c. hasta luego, "yes-no questions, matchings, sound-symbol perceptions, and correspondences. These drills interest the class and lend a sense of constant progression.

I should further like the manual to be so devised that pages, exercises or tests can be mechanically reproduced on the electrical rexographer and thus avoid the need for constant typing. Short colorful filmstrips, occasional movies that review the vocabularies, flannel cut-outs that are easily carried, songs that reflect the lessons are needed. The inevitable tapes should be so recorded that the short segments are spaced with FLES children in mind; the exercises should be prefaced with a clear and simple explanation of their purpose and hopefully made by natives with pleasant, moderately-pitched voices, speaking slowly -- NOT at normal speed; at least, not in the earliest stages.

Do I ask for too much? I think not. Most materials already make use of many of the suggestions. If the publishers will ask a wide and representative group of FLES teachers what has been successful in their classes, what they the teachers want, what the children really enjoy doing, and then have FLES teachers, not linguists or college professors create the materials, I feel assured that we will have taken a major step toward <u>maintaining</u>

the children's interest throughout the essentially duller early stages, equipping them with a strong background in the fundamental skills and endowing them with enough interest in Spanish to continue until they have mastered Spanish to their fullest individual capabilities.